WAR of KINGS

WARRIORS

MARVEL DIGITAL COMICS EXCLUSIVE

THE PLANET THRNN...

I HAVE ACCOMPANIED EMPEROR VULCAN TO DOZENS OF NEWLY CONQUERED PLANETS. BEEN PRESENT FOR THIS SPEECH EVERY TIME.

BUT I HAVE NEVER LISTENED TO THE WORDS. THAT IS NOT MY PLACE. MY ATTENTION MUST BE ELSEWHERE.

I AM *GLADIATOR*. PRAETOR OF THE *IMPERIAL GUARD* OF THE *SHI'AR EMPIRE*.

MY SWORN DUTY IS TO OBEY THE COMMANDS AND PROTECT THE PERSON OF WHOSOEVER SITS UPON THE THRONE.

MY *APPROVAL* OF THEIR POLICIES IS NEITHER REQUIRED. NOR *ASKED*.

IN HIS PUSH TO EXPAND HIS EMPIRE, VULCAN HAS EXTERMINATED ENTIRE CIVILIZATIONS, ENSLAVED COUNTLESS OTHERS.

HE'S MADE MORE THAN A FEW ENEMIES.

THE RIFLE IS A UNIQUE MARRIAGE OF RIGELLIAN PRECISION COMBINED WITH BADOON LETHALITY.

THE GUNMAN CAN SIGHT HIS TARGET FROM ACROSS A CITY, AND STILL PLACE HIS SHOT IN THE VICTIM'S EYE.

IF NOT FOR MY ENHANCED VISION, I'D NEVER HAVE SPOTTED HIM.

THEN I WONDER WHY I HAVEN'T ALREADY SLAIN THE SNIPER.

THIS IS FAR FROM THE FIRST ATTEMPT ON VULCAN'S LIFE. I HAVE NEVER HESITATED TO PUT THEM DOWN WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW?

CAN IT BE...THAT NO ONE *ELSE* HAS SEEN THE DANGER? THAT NO ONE KNOWS *I* HAVE SEEN IT?

I ALLOW MYSELF ANOTHER MOMENT. TO IMAGINE AN EMPIRE, A ***UNIVERSE***, WITHOUT VULCAN.

TO EVEN CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY IS ***TREASON.*** A VIOLATION OF ALL I STAND FOR, OF MY VERY ***EXISTENCE.*** AND YET...

...IF I SIMPLY STOOD BY A FEW MOMENTS MORE...

ZZKOW

...NO ONE WOULD KNOW I HAD FAILED IN MY DUTY.

NO ONE BUT ***ME***...

...AND THE GHOSTS OF MY PAST.

STRONTIA. CINTUNIS AQO.

PART 1

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HNGH!

DO NOT FEAR, TENNET. I HAVE YOU.

CADET KALLARK!

YES, HONORED ELDER?

YOU ABANDONED YOUR TARGET.

I WOULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED A WARRIOR OF *YOUR* PROUD BLOODLINE TO *SHIRK* HIS DUTY.

WITH RESPECT, ELDER, I HAVE *NOT*. HONOR DEMANDS I AID MY COMRADE IF I MAY DO SO WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE MISSION.

AND I ASSURE YOU THAT THE TARGET...

...SHALL BE ACQUIRED!

THRAKOOM

"OBSERVE, CADET TENNET, HOW KALLARK'S CONFIDENCE DOES NOT FALTER, EVEN WHEN HE IS UNEXPECTEDLY ATTACKED BY SORCERY."

"BUT--ELDER, THOSE ARTS ARE ***FORBIDDEN***, BY YOUR OWN DECREE!"

OF COURSE, FOR EVEN OUR STRONGEST ARE VULNERABLE TO ***MAGIC***. WHICH IS EXACTLY WHY WE PERMIT CERTAIN ADEPTS TO ***STUDY*** IT, SO WE MAY BE ***PREPARED*** FOR ITS USE BY AN ENEMY.

A WARRIOR ***MUST*** BE READY FOR ANYTHING, TENNET. OUR PSIONIC-FUELED ABILITIES, FEARSOME AS THEY ARE, DEPEND ENTIRELY ON OUR CONFIDENCE.

SHOULD WE ***DOUBT*** OURSELVES--***QUESTION*** OURSELVES, AS YOU DID WHEN STRUCK BY THE STRONTIUM MISSILE--OUR POWER FADES.

WE ARE NOT ***MACHINES***. WE ***ALL*** FEEL UNCERTAINTY. BUT WE MUST BANISH IT--OVERCOME IT. OR WE WILL ***FALL***...AS YOU LEARNED.

TO MY ETERNAL ***SHAME***, I WILL DO BETTER NEXT TIME, ELDER.

NO, TENNET. FOR YOU, THE TRIAL IS OVER. YOU WILL BE A VALUED MEMBER OF OUR ARMY, BUT IN ***THESE*** CONTESTS, THERE IS ***NO ROOM*** FOR ERROR.

YOUR PRISONER, ELDER.

WELL DONE, KALLARK. YOU HAVE WON A SPOT ON THE FINAL ROSTER.

BUT DO NOT THINK YOUR CHALLENGES ARE ENDED. THE MOST DIFFICULT IS YET TO COME...

ONE HOUR LATER...

BY ROYAL DECREE, THE SHI'AR'S NEW *IMPERIAL GUARD* WILL BE A COMPANY OF *ELITES.* EACH RACE IN THE EMPIRE MAY SEND ONLY ITS *FINEST* WARRIOR.

TO REPRESENT YOUR PEOPLE IS THE *HIGHEST* HONOR...AND ANY OF THE TEN OF YOU WOULD SERVE STRONTIA WITH DISTINCTION.

HOWEVER, THERE IS ROOM FOR BUT *ONE.* SO THERE WILL BE A *FINAL* TRIAL.

"YOUR NATURAL ABILITIES, ALREADY PRODIGIOUS, SHALL BE ENHANCED TO *GLADIATOR* LEVEL.

"YOU WILL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE IN THE VACUUM OF SPACE. YOUR POWER SHALL BE *UNMATCHED* THROUGHOUT THE UNIVERSE.

"FEW CAN SURVIVE THE GLADIATOR PROCESS. FEWER STILL POSSESS THE *STRENGTH OF CHARACTER* TO BE TRUSTED WITH ITS GIFTS."

ALL OF YOU ARE WORTHY. EVEN WE, YOUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS, COULD NOT CHOOSE AMONG YOU.

THERE IS ONLY *ONE,* IN ALL THE EMPIRE, WHO CAN.

SHI'AR IMPERIAL FLAGSHIP, "SHANRA'S TALON".

ALL HAIL T'KORR!

THIS IS THE BEST THE STRONTIANS COULD DO?

YES, MAJESTOR.

THEY'RE YOUNG.

ONLY THE YOUNG CAN SURVIVE THE GLADIATOR PROCESS. BUT REST ASSURED THEY ARE CAPABLE. EVEN AN ORDINARY STRONTIAN HAS THE POWER TO DECIMATE AN ARMY.

MMM. AND TELL ME, CHANCELLOR VITANA, WHY DID MY FATHER ACCEPT STRONTIANS INTO THE SHI'AR EMPIRE? DID HE NOT FEAR SO POWERFUL A PEOPLE MIGHT ***THREATEN*** HIS THRONE?

YOUR FATHER BROUGHT THEM THE CURE TO THE ***WRAITH PLAGUE*** THAT RAVAGED THEIR PLANET. IN RETURN, THEY SWORE UNENDING LOYALTY TO THE SHI'AR THRONE.

STRONTIANS VALUE NOTHING ABOVE HONOR AND DUTY. THEIR FEALTY IS ***WITHOUT QUESTION.***

INDEED?

LET US SEE IF THAT'S TRUE.

CADETS, I WILL MAKE MY FINAL SELECTION AFTER OBSERVING HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELVES ON A MISSION OF *UTMOST IMPORTANCE.*

THERE IS A GROUP WHOSE EXISTENCE CONCERNS ME. THEY ARE WISE AND POWERFUL. ONE DAY THEY MAY PLOT AGAINST MY RULE.

YOU SHALL SOLVE THIS PROBLEM FOR ME.

YOUR MISSION, CADETS, IS TO RETURN TO YOUR HOME...

...AND *SLAY* YOUR COUNCIL OF ELDERS.

TO BE CONTINUED!